

Empowering the Nation with Women-Led Development

Examples highlighting the developments in the area of women empowerment are:

- The **first female fighter pilots** have recently been appointed in the Indian Air Force. The participation of women in combat roles in the Army is also strongly under consideration.
- India's successful *launch of the Mangalyaan and the record-breaking 104 Nano satellites* launched into orbit on-board a single rocket had a team of women scientist behind them.
- India has been successful in achieving **gender parity** in school education. The literacy rate of women has risen from a mere 9 per cent in 1951 to 65 per cent in 2011.
- Today, every **fourth worker** in India is a woman. **One third** of all certified engineers are now women and over three fourths of all health workers at primary level are women.
- In a country bursting with entrepreneurial spirit, today almost **every fifth entrepreneur** is a woman.
- In **politics too**, the figures are more encouraging than ever before. Elected women representatives now make up about *46 percent of our panchayat members*. With these 1.3 million + women in positions of power at the village level, the landscape of our country is changing from ground up. For instance, where in the 1957 elections only 45 women had contested general elections, in the last election, 668 women candidates contested.
- On the **health front**, improvements have been noted with the average life expectancy of women having risen from 31.7 years in 1950-51 to about 70 years in 2016.
- **Institutional births** have risen to an all- time high of 79 per cent in 2014-15. The **maternal mortality rate** has dropped by half in the decade between 2001-03 and 2011-13.
- The number of women with a **bank or savings account**, which they operate themselves, has increased from just 15 percent in 2005-06 to 53 per cent in 2015-16.

Steps taken by the government to end the existing discrimination:

A. Financial Empowerment

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** Programme addresses the complex issue of mindsets in all districts of India.
- Along with this, the **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana** was also launched in 2015, under which small affordable deposits are made in the bank accounts of girls, with the benefit of higher rate of interest. The amount can be withdrawn by the girl on reaching 18 years of age, giving her a fund for higher education or other investments.
- Through the **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana and PM Jan Dhan Yojana**, Government have enabled banking services for the unbanked. Women's share of total savings accounts increased from 28 per cent in 2014 to 40 per cent in 2017 (according to the data form top 40 banks and RRBs.)

B. Encouraging Entrepreneurship

- Under the **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana**, government has provided credit to small entrepreneurship without the need for collateral or a guarantor. 75 per cent of these loans have been given to women.
- Over 47 lakh Self Help Groups (SHGs) have been promoted under the **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)**.
- Under the **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna**, a large number of Indian youth have taken up industry relevant skill training. Till date, half of the certificates awarded under this Yojana have been given to women candidates.

C. Empowering Motherhood

- The **Maternity Benefit Act** has been amended to extend the period of mandatory paid maternity leave for working women to 26 weeks.
- In order to extend protection to the unorganized sector as well, pregnant and lactating mothers are provided cash incentives under the **PM Matru Vandana Yojana**. As partial compensation for wage loss, these mothers are provided Rs. 6,000 as incentive, which enables them to take adequate rest before and after the delivery and exclusively breast feed their child.
- At the village level, women members of panchayats are leading the empowerment of their villages. To support their process the Ministry of Women and Child Development has conducted training for 18,000 women members.

D. Women Safety

- Government is strictly implementing the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**. This provides a safe and secure environment to women at the workplace and covers all women – all ages, public and private sector and even those women visiting an office.
- An important aspect of empowerment is also safety. For this, the government has sanctioned **181 Women Helplines** and **206 One Stop Centres** have become operational where women affected by violence can access quick and easy help.
- **33 per cent reservation** for women in the police force is also being implemented. A feature of **Panic Buttons** will soon be available on all mobile phones to provide emergency response system to women in distress.
- The **Nirbhaya Fund** is also being used to roll-out comprehensive plans to make 8 major cities in the country safer for women and also improve forensic analysis abilities in cases of sexual assault.

E. Accessing the Inaccessible

- The Government implements a number of schemes for the empowerment of women. However, these do not always reach beneficiaries in remote or backward areas.

- To overcome this problem, Government has recently launched **The Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme**. Under this, 3 lakh student volunteers are fanning out across the country to directly reach women at village level with government schemes and services for their empowerment.

Conclusion:

- The existing schemes are being implemented to their full potential so that the women at the bottom of the pyramid can experience a quantum jump in their status.
- The way forward lies in the conviction that we must have **women-led development** rather than just women's development.

Empowering Women through 'Continuum of Care'

- Women empowerment begins from the womb. Preventing sex selection and stopping sex selective elimination is the first step towards empowerment of women.
- The Government has enacted the **Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques. (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994** for prohibition of sex selection before or after conception and for prevention of misuse of pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostic techniques for sex determination.
- Ministry of Health implements several programmes for health of women following a life-cycle '**continuum of care**' approach to ensure equal focus on various life stages of women, ranging from a spectrum of programmes for pregnant women, the neonates, infants, young children, adolescents, and family planning programmes for women in the reproductive age group.
- In addition, the public health departments also pave the way for economic empowerment of women by engaging women in positions ranging from village level **Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)** to health care providers such as Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), health care administrators and policy makers at State and National levels.

A. Maternity Care

- The **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)** has been launched to provide quality *ante-natal care (ANC)* to pregnant women on the 9th of every month.
- ANC services are also provided at the village level through **Village Health & Nutrition Days (VHNDs)** and at health facilities routinely to ensure at least four ANCs to women.
- **Iron folic acid, calcium** etc., are provided to pregnant women at the checkups and investigations are conducted to identify any complications of pregnancy and to ensure safe delivery.
- **Mother and Child Protection (MCP) Cards** and **safe motherhood booklets** are provided to pregnant women to inform them about the essential care to be taken during pregnancy.

- To harness IT in reaching the most vulnerable and most inaccessible, the Ministry runs a **Mother and child Tracking System (MCTS)/Reproductive Child Health (RCH) portal**.
- It has also launched **Kilkari mobile services** which tracks and facilitates timely delivery of antenatal, postnatal care services to women and immunization services to children by the front line workers through proper line listing and also targeted age-specific messages and calls.

B. Shishu Suraksha

- **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK)** entitles all pregnant women delivering in public health institutions to absolutely free and no-expense delivery including Caesarean section.
- To ensure quality of services around childbirth, Government has recently launched the **LaQshya program- Labour room Quality improvement** initiative for focused and targeted approach to strengthen key processes related to the labour rooms and maternity operation theatres.
- MoHFW also implements the **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)** - a cash transfer scheme to promote institutional deliveries.
- The first one thousand days in the life of a child hold the key to unlock and shape the life-long potential of a person. This brings the importance to parenting methods..
- In a conscious effort to educate the parents and caregivers about good child rearing practices, a book titled “**Journey of first 1000 Days**’ has been published by the Ministry of Health.

C. Healthy Adolescence

- Ministry of Health initiated **Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karayakarm (RKSK)** with the objectives to increase the awareness and access to information about adolescent health.
- It also provides counselling and health services as well as specific services such as sanitary napkin; iron folic acid supplementation etc.
- Under this programme, **Weekly Iron- Folic Acid Supplementation (WIFS)** entails provision of weekly supervised Iron-Folic Acid (IFA) tablets to in-school boys and girls and out-of-school girls and biannual Albendazole tablets for helminthic control for prevention of iron and folic acid deficiency anaemia.

D. Planned Pregnancy

- The **family planning programme** implemented by MoHFW provides a basket of choices to help parents decide, freely and responsibly, the number and the spacing of their children.
- Recently, MoHFW has introduced **new contraceptives** viz. Injectable contraceptive Medroxy Progesterone Acetate (MPA) - **Antara** and a non-hormonal, non-steroidal weekly Centchroman pill, **Chhaya** to meet the changing needs of people.

- Home delivery of contraceptives by ASHAs aims to improve access to contraceptives for eligible couples.

E. Caring for the Girl Child

- In order to provide specialized care to infants in case of complications, **Special Newborn Care Units** have been established at district level and **Newborn Stabilization Units and newborn care corners** have been established at sub district level.
- India has the world's largest **Universal Immunization Program**. To ensure full immunization for children up to two years of age and pregnant women, **Mission Indradhanush**, was started in 2014.
- **Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs)** have also been established to provide specialized care to children having severe acute malnutrition.
- **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)**, is an initiative to improve the overall quality of life of children through early detection of birth defects, diseases, deficiencies, development delays.

F. Drugs and Diagnostics

- **Free Drugs and Free Diagnostics Scheme** for essential medicines at public health facilities, mobile medical units etc., are other platforms where women can avail free healthcare services.
- **Ayushman Bharat** also brings with it several preventive and promotive services for women through the 'Health & Wellness Centres' (HWCs) which shall provide comprehensive primary care in addition to specialized mother and child care services.
- India was validated for **Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination (MNTE)** in April 2015, much ahead of the global target date of December 2015.
- We have accomplished the **Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for Maternal Mortality**. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has substantially dropped from by a massive 37 points. It is now 130/lakh live births.

Helping Women Gain Control of their Lives

The concept of empowerment is defined as the process by which women take control and ownership of their choices. *Entrepreneurship development and income generating activities* are a feasible solution for empowering women.

SHG: As a tool of Empowerment

- Micro-finance with Self Help Groups (SHG) play an effective role for promoting women entrepreneurship and financial empowerment.

- The **SHGs micro-credit mechanism** makes the members to get involved in other community development activities. Micro-credit is promoting the small-scale business enterprises, and its major aim is to alleviate poverty by income generating activities.
- SHGs, such as *Abhinav Farmers Co-operative Society, Grassroots, Grameen Bank, Assam Tea Corporation, Kudumbashree, Indira Kranti Padham* are actively participating in empowering women.
- **Financial Security** - The SHGs have helped in better recovery of loans, development of thrift and self-help among members, effective use of credit for the purchase of income generating assets, and empowerment of women.
- RBI also understands the role and importance of SHGs in financing, and has extended medium sized loans to women entrepreneurs with the support of NABARD.

Government Initiatives:

- **Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs)** has been launched to cater to the needs of potential women entrepreneurs, who may not have adequate educational background and skills.
- A *special prize* for “**Outstanding Women Entrepreneurs**” of the year is being given to recognise achievements made by and to provide incentives to women entrepreneurs.
- **Income Generating Scheme**, implemented by the Department of Women and Child Development, provides assistance for setting up training-cum-income generating activities for needy women.
- The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has been implementing two special schemes for women namely, **Mahila Udyam Nidhi** which is an exclusive scheme for providing equity to women entrepreneurs and the **Mahila Vikas Nidhi** which offers developmental assistance for pursuit of income generating activities to women.
- SIDBI also provides training for credit utilisation as also credit delivery skills for the executives of voluntary organisations working for women.
- **Startup India:** It promotes entrepreneurship by mentoring, nurturing and facilitating startup throughout their life cycle.
- **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP):** Launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, it trains women with no access to formal skill training facilities, especially in rural India. The initiative reaches out to all Indian women above 16 years of age and imparts skills in several sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, food processing, IT services etc.
- **Stand-Up India:** Launched in 2015, Stand-Up India seeks to leverage institutional credit for the benefit of India’s underprivileged. At least one woman and one individual from the SC or ST communities are granted loans between Rs. 1 million to Rs. 10 million to set up Greenfield enterprises in manufacturing, services or the trading sector.

- **Trade related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD):** It enables credit availability to interested women through NGOs. As such, women can receive support of registered NGOs in both accessing loan facilities, and receiving counselling and training opportunities.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** To enhance opportunities for livelihood creation and employability.
- **Science for Equity Empowerment and Development (SEED):** It aims to provide opportunities to motivated scientist and field level workers with focus on women to undertake action-oriented, location specific projects for socio-economic gain, particularly in rural areas.
- **NITI Aayog** launched the **Women Entrepreneurship platform (WEP)**. The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem across India to realize for women across India their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their business.
- The three pillars on which WEP is built : **Ichha Shakti** (motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their enterprise), **Gyaan Shakti** (providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship) and **Karma Shakti** (providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up business).
- **Mudra Yojana Scheme for Women:** This scheme has been launched for individual women wanting to start small new enterprises and businesses as well as group of women wanting to start a venture together.

Conclusion:

Women's entrepreneurship can make a particularly strong contribution to the economic well-being of the family and communities, poverty reduction and women's empowerment, thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs).

Breaking the Shackles of Financial Deprivation

- Financial inclusion helps in breaking the shackles of financial deprivation by providing a linkage between people and financial mainstream of the economy. It also mitigates the exploitation of vulnerable sections by the usurious moneylenders by facilitating easy access to formal credit.
- Availability of credit at reasonable rates boosts the entrepreneurship quotient of women. Furthermore, financial inclusion as a tool for women empowerment is not all about providing credit.
- Another dimension which has long struggled to get its due share of attention is safe, easy and feasible opportunities for savings. Informal source often include buying jewellery or keeping idle cash at home for formal savings options.

- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** has been launched to provide banking facilities to all people.
- **Insurance penetration** is one other parameter to judge financial inclusion. Policies like **Suraksha Bima Yojana and Swasthya Bima Yojna** are providing the much-needed cushioning against health and disability contingencies. Complementing such schemes are the pension schemes launched recently like **Atal Pension Yojana**.

Previous efforts:

- RBI in 2005-06 has initiated a series of reforms and urged banks to promote financial services among the low-income groups and provide a basic no-frills banking account with nil or very minimal balance or charge to enhance financial inclusion.
- IN 2006, another major step taken by RBI was to allow banks to engage Banking Correspondent (BCs) and Business Facilitators (BFs) as intermediaries for providing financial services, especially in rural areas.
- In the financial year 2007-08, two funds-Financial Inclusion Fund and Financial Inclusion Technology Fund were initiated.

Challenges faced by current approach:

- Between the period of 2011-17, 77 per cent of females above 15 years are reported to have a bank account, which is a 51 percent increases from 2011. The increase has been mainly due to Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana.
- However, the main issue with this figure is that significant percentage of such accounts are zero-balance accounts, meaning lack of usage of services.
- **BCs:** The strategy of Banking Correspondents has not given fruitful results due to lack of adequate branding of BCs because of **low incentive and compensation structure** and preferences for brick and mortar branch by the rural economy.
- **Post Offices:** The major bottlenecks remains acute shortage of manpower. The rural populations still depends on informal sources of lending as post offices do not provide such services.
- **Mobile Banking:** Despite similar literacy rates and stronger banking structure than countries like Uganda and Kenya, India has failed to witness a revolution in mobile banking which was rather visible in countries like Kenya where over 70 per cent of its adult population has mobile bank accounts.
- **Literacy Programs:** Financial Literacy through audio and visual-Doordarshan and established credit counselling centres have not performed satisfactorily.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Anganwadi System:** Anganwadi workers can be given basic banking training which will give them the opportunity to act as a Banking Correspondents (BC). By this way the existing

infrastructure and personnel can be used to overcome the barriers of lack of physical presence of banks and also ensure last-mile delivery as promised by BCs.

- **Innovation in Credit Scoring Models:** Women are disproportionately disadvantaged by traditional credit scoring models that rely on credit history and collateral. Innovative ways to assess risk quotient of a potential woman borrower should be used. One such way as is being experimented in **Africa is psychometric testing** to analyse ability, intelligence and character traits to assess creditworthiness.
- **Role of Priority Sector Advance:** More diversified, qualitative and quantitative loans through banks are required to prevent the micro enterprises owners from falling in informal interest rates web.
- **Tailoring Products Suited For Women:** Men usually own assets like land, women possess jewellery and other valuables. Understanding these differences and moulding credit products compatible with such ownership patterns is required.
- **Financial Literacy and Demographic Dividend:** With more and more women joining the workforce, there is a need to educate them about financial independence and related services like Provident Funds. Insurance Cover and direct Benefit Transfer Schemes.
- **Mobile Money-A new Dimension:** There is a need to make the rural women more aware about such innovations and give them the elementary knowledge of its operations which will help build their credibility in these mobile wallets. Informative sessions in panchayats and fair price shops can help in imparting this much required information.
- **Important of Further Research and Gender Desegregated Data:** There is need for family level desegregated data which highlights the reasons why women lack in accessing formal financial services.

Empowering Tribal Women

Data:

- There are around 705 Scheduled Tribes (STs) notified in India. Apart from this, around 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are also present. ST community constituted around 8.6 percent of the total population as per Census 2011.
- The population of tribal women is 5.19 Crores which is 49.7 percent of the total tribal populations.
- Sex Ratio has shown improvement from 978 to 990 females per 1000 males in the period of 2001 to 2011 as far as tribal community is concerned.
- The literacy rate among STs of India remain below the national average of 73 per cent. The female literacy at 49 per cent compared poorly to 69 percent among the male counterparts in tribal communities.

Different initiatives:

- **Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA)** was carved out of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment in the year 1999. It is committed to tribal development through specially tailored educational, infrastructure and livelihoods schemes to effectively plug the critical gaps.
- The **National Commission for Schedules Tribes (NCST)** was established through an amendment to Article 338 of the constitution by way of Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003. NCST oversees the implementation of various safeguards provided to Scheduled Tribes under the Constitutions.
- **Access to Quality Education** - One of the flagship interventions of MoTA, the **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs)**, focuses on improving access to quality education. In **Ashram Schools** the focus is on ST girls. ST girls hostels have been constructed in different places.
- The **Pre and Post Matric scholarships** for ST students, majority of whom are girls is to enable them to pursue their education till 12th standard.
- Under the scheme of “**National Fellowship and Scholarship for Higher Education of ST Students**”, ST students are encouraged to acquire higher qualifications like M.Phil and Ph.D. 30% awards are earmarked for ST girls under the **National Overseas Scholarships (NOS)** for pursuing Post Graduation, PhD and Post-Doctoral studies abroad.
- **Schemes for Economic Development** - The **National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation** is an apex organization under Ministry of Tribal Affairs for economic development of STs.
- The Corporation is having an exclusive scheme for economic development of ST women titled “**Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana**” (**AMS**). Under the scheme, the Corporation provides financial assistance upto 90 percent to projects at a concessional rate of interest of 4 per cent.
- Schemes like Minimum Support Price to Minor Forest Produce (MSP to MFP) and support to tribal artisans by **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED)** also benefit the ST women largely.
- **Right to Forest Produce - The Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**, provides for full and unrestricted participation of women at all levels.
- Another important provision in the Act is that the “right conferred shall be registered jointly in the name of both the spouses”. The Forest Rights Committee, provides that atleast two-third members shall be Scheduled Tribes and not less than one-third of such members shall be women.
- Under the scheme of **Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub Scheme (SCA to TSS)** and Grants under Article 275(1) of the constitution skill development and capacity building of ST women are taken up by States with complete support of MoTA.

- MoTA has encouraged tribal festivals at National and State levels that serves as a window for tribals including women folk to showcase rich skills and talents in varied art forms.

Conclusion:

- Empowerment of women is a continuous process and MoTA is committed to it. Despite best efforts there are multiple challenges which are being addressed. The gap between the general population and STs in general and amongst ST population in particular needs to be eliminated.

In Pursuit of Inclusive Growth in India

Facts for India

- In improving women's participation by 10 percentage points, India could add USD 700 billion by 2025.
- The already low female labour force participation rate in India is declining further when compared to any other region in the world.
- Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR) declines with education and slightly increases at very high levels. Women in Northern states have lower FWPR compared to Southern states; more women are in subsidiary status employment in both rural and urban areas and they predominate in the agricultural sector.
- The next largest FWPR is in public services where the state is the primary employer followed by one segment of manufacturing industries like the textile sector.

Determinants of FWPR

- Demand side or structural factors and supply side or cultural factors like family roles and societal norms impact FWPR.
- The role of caregiving and the limited time spent by men in sharing the household work are primary factors depressing FWPR.
- Easier access to transportation would enable women to save time, empowering them to take on economic activities alongside care work.
- As part of corporate governance policies all over the world, India instituted quotas for women in the board since 2013.
- Better responsibilities of the state to crime rates sexual harassment, laws extending night working hours for women and incentives for women entrepreneurs, impacts inter-state variation in FWPR.
- Chances of participation in workforce for women increases in regions where there is a higher reported confidence in police/judiciary and lower reported crime.

- Female political representation promotes female employment due to access to public goods like paved roads, primary health centres and banks. Higher receptiveness of female leaders leads to More accommodating work environment for their female constituents.

Steps Taken:

- Fiscal policies like lower taxes did not improve female employment as the gains from it perhaps did not offset the costs involved. With statement and low share of formal sector employment, the announcement in Union Budget 2018, that contribution by new women recruits to EPFO be reduced from 12 per cent to 8 per cent to increase the take home pay may neither incentivize participation nor retention rates.
- However, MGNREGA increased FWPR, reduced gender gaps in wages. With the expansion of NRHM, ASHA workers have increased, impacting FWPR.
- Alongside the ICDS, the Creche schemes should be strengthened further, as, in these two schemes, women would be the service providers which could make widespread additions to workforce across all rural India.
- **Hostel for Working Women Scheme** was brought in as an effort towards creating a safe working environment.
- The **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961** was amended in 2017 to primarily include increased paid maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks, provide an option of 'work from home' for women after the 26 weeks and also included provision of crèche facility and leave for mothers adopting children.
- The launch of online market platform for Indian women entrepreneurs with e-commerce marketplaces known as **Mahila E Haat** will improve market access.

Conclusion:

- When the policies and instructions favouring development improve so would economic citizenship for all the socially disadvantaged groups including women.

Empowering Women: Legal Provisions

Our Constitution guarantees the **right to equality and the right to not be discriminated against** on the basis of sex.

Legal Provisions:

A. Section 497

- It penalizes any man who has illicit relations with the wife of another man without the consent or connivance of that man. This is an extremely gender biased provision and is violative of both, Article 14 and 15 of the Constitution.
- Firstly, it treats a *woman like the property of her husband*. It is not an offence if such an act is done 'with the consent or connivance' of the husband.

- Secondly, the offence is said to be committed by the man having illicit relations with the wife of another man and the *wife is not punishable even as an abettor as she is treated like a victim.*
- Thirdly, if a man has relations outside the marriage, neither him nor the woman with whom he has such relations *can be prosecuted.*
- The recommendations by the 42nd Law Report, 1971 and the Mali Math Committee Report, 2013, to amend the definition to make it gender neutral, have failed to materialize.
- It has just to light recently in **Joseph Shine v. UOI**, wherein the bench observed that in this provision, the concept of gender neutrality is absent and it creates a dent on the individual identity of a women.

B. Issue of Triple Talaq

- Another issue with which the Supreme Court of India dealt with was the so-called provision of Instant Triple Talaq.
- Many Muslim majority countries, **including Pakistan**, have abolished this practice. Finally, in 2017 the constitutional validity of Instant Triple Talaq came before the Supreme Court of India in the case of **Shayara Bano V Unon of India**. By a 3:2 majority, it was held to be unconstitutional, arbitrary and violative of Article 14.
- However, other forms of talaq still exist, wherein Muslim men still have the power to pronounce divorce without resorting to any legal recourse.
- In December 2017, the **Muslim Women (Protection of Right on Marriage) Bill, 2017** was introduced in the Lok Sabha, which sought to make Instant Triple Talaq a cognizable and non-bailable offence.
- The Bill, in its present form, cannot be said to be devoid of problems. It raises important questions such as- is making it a cognizable offence fair to the Muslim men? Under the Indian Penal Code 1860 the offences related to marriage, where no physical harm is caused to the wife, are made non-cognizable to ensure that prosecution can only be at the instance of the aggrieved party.
- The Bill, in an attempt to promote the rights of the Muslim women, may inadvertently prejudice the rights of the Muslim men and discriminate against them.

C. Right to Property

- The amendment to the **Hindu Succession Act, 1956** gave women the right to a share in the joint family property of both, the parents and the in-laws.
- The ouster of women from right to inherent and own property, if they married outside the community, is present under tribal law as well as under various religious laws.

D. Right to Religious Identify

- Similar is the situation under the Parsi Laws, where Parsi women who marry outside their community are said to have lost their religious identity. The children of a Parsi man married outside the community, can become a Parsi.
- However, the children of a Parsi woman married outside the community cannot become a Parsi. A Parsi woman married out the community is not allowed to visit the Tower of Silence and attend her parents funeral rituals.
- This was challenged by a Parsi woman, Goolrukh Gupta in the Gujarat High Court, wherein the Court upheld the decision to debar a Parsi woman from performing religious practices by observing that in all religions, whether Christianity, Parsi, or Judaism, the religious identity of a woman shall merge into that of her husband.
- When this ruling was challenged in the Supreme Court of India, the Parsi Trust went against its age-old tradition and stated that it would allow her to visit the "Tower of Silence" to attend her parents' funeral rituals.

E. Physical Molestation

- After the infamous Nirbhaya gang-rape case that the **Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013** (Anti-Rape Bill) was passed under which the definition was enlarged.
- The **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** was passed which provided that a juvenile, 16 years or older, who a heinous offence (offence punishable with imprisonment of seven years or more) will be tried as an adult.
- After the Kathua gang-rape case, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 was approved by the President, under which the quantum of punishment for rape was increase especially in case of a girl under 16 years of age.
- However, the definition of rape, does not recognise 'marital rape' as 'rape', unless the wife is under 15 years of age.

F. Common Civil Code

- With the increase in the number of women approaching the Courts to protect their fundamental rights, the Law Commission has been asked to probe into the possibility of implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in India.
- The Supreme Court of India has observed in **Mohd. Ahmed Khan vs Shah Bano Begum** that it is a matter of regret that Article 44 of our Constitution has remained a dead letter.
- Again, in **Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India** the Supreme Court discussed the need for a Uniform Civil Code.

Conclusion:

Over the years, the need for reform has been recognized in India and the Supreme Court of India has been playing a constructive role in reshaping laws which have become archaic. However, we still have a long way to move towards achieving an equal status for women in the society.

Women, Health and Development

- Women-especially pregnant and lactating women-form one of the most vulnerable segments of the population from the nutritional point of view.
- Under-nutrition and anaemia in pregnant women is a major factor responsible for low birth weight of the offspring. Also there has been progressive rise in over nutrition in women in all segments of the population both in urban and in rural areas.
- The problems of **triple burden of malnutrition** (under-nutrition, over nutrition and anaemia) in women is creating complex problem.

Economic Growth and Energy Consumption

- The per capita energy intake of both urban and rural households from surveys carried out by the National Sample Survey Organisation showed that the higher GDP growth and rise in per capita incomes in the last three decades was associated with a progressive reduction in per capita energy intake in both urban and rural areas.
- Data from surveys carried out by National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) shoed similar trends.
- It is possible that perceptive Indians realized that there has been a steep reduction in their physical activity, and therefore voluntarily reduced their energy intake.
- This could partly explain the **relatively slower increase in over-nutrition rates** in India as compared to other developing nations that are undergoing rapid economic transition.

Nutritional Status of Women

- NNMB repeat rural surveys showed that, between 1975 and 2012, there was a reduction in under-nutrition from 52 per cent to 33 per cent in women.
- Over the same period, the prevalence of over-nutrition increased from 3 to 16 per cent in women. Data from NFHS 2, 3 and 4 showed that in women there was a sustained fall in under-nutrition rates and a steady rise in over-nutrition rates between 1998 and 2015.
- The *reduction in under-nutrition was matched by the rise in over-nutrition*, and so the proportion of normally-nourished persons **remained unchanged at around 60 per cent**.
- Currently, all pregnant women have access to antenatal care and take-home rations are provided to pregnant women under Integrated Child Development services (ICDS).

- There has not been any increase in energy intake in women over years, but there has been a steep reduction in physical activity. Steep fall in physical activity is the major driver for the rising over-nutrition rates in women.
- Over-nutrition is associated with increased risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension and diabetes.
- Health education to women for sensitising them is essential. Simultaneously, arrangements for providing check up at village/ward level, as is currently being done for maternal and child care have to be made.
- A schedule has to be drawn up, as is being done for child immunisation and information on the days when over-nutrition, NCD detection services are available have to be disseminated.

Anaemia in Women

- India is home to the largest number of anaemic persons in the world. In India, the prevalence of anaemia is high because of :
 - **low overall dietary intake**, poor iron and folic acid intake,
 - **poor bio-availability** of iron in the phytate fibre-rich Indian diet resulting in widespread iron and folic acid deficiencies and;
 - **chronic blood loss** due to infections such as malaria and hook worm infestations.
- In India, anaemia begins right from infancy, continues into childhood, increases in severity during adolescence in girls, gets aggravated during pregnancy and among the elderly.
- The three-pronged strategy to address this issue:
 - increasing iron intake of all persons of the household through dietary diversification and use of iron-fortified iodized salt,
 - iron and folic acid supplementation to women and
 - testing for, detecting and treating anaemia as and when women access health care for any reason will accelerate the pace of reduction in anaemia and enable the country to achieve the SDG target for reduction in anaemia.

Communication: Overarching Role in Women Empowerment

- Communication unleashes a process of social interaction through various modes for exchange of information-verbal, non-verbal, words in print or audio-visual format.
- The overwhelming expansion of communication facilities has been instrumental in bringing to the fore myriad gender issues, hitherto remaining outside the limelight.
- This has significantly led to the rising up of a large number of women, both as key beneficiaries to avail the fruits of targeted developmental interventions and also as protagonists, to narrate their untold stories of denial, deprivation and injustice.

- The **National Policy for Women (NPW), 2015**, is a landmark document, which pronounces the resolve realising the constructive engagement of women in nation development.
- The **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**, is a path-breaking law, enforcing an obligation upon every employer for ensuring a safe working space.
- **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) Scheme 2016-17**, is a combined strategy for inter-sectoral convergence of programs for women, with the use of multiple communication tools in advocacy campaigns.
- **Women's Helpline** came into existence to reach out to women in distress. **Support to Training and Employment Program (STEP)** is aimed at adding new skills to women.
- Women's Self Help Groups (SHGs), as grass roots institutions, have mobilised and facilitated women in availing facilities for development, be it information, financial or material resources or services.
- In all such women-centric programs, **Information, Education and Communication (IEC), forms an inseparable part.**
- The Public Service Broadcaster, with its country wide footprint, and two wings, **All India Radio (AIR), and Doordarshan**, is a front-runner in public communication.
- '**Stree Shakti**' a one-hour show on DD National, highlights the success stories of women achievers. DD News airs '**Tejaswin**', which has already crossed more than 100 episodes.
- '**Main Kuch bhi Kar Sakti Hoon**', another program on Doordarshan, has earned many laurels as being one of the most watched shows in the world, with a viewership of over 400 million across 50 countries.
- Community Radio, as a grass roots institution, has held out a new promise to women in raising area-specific issues, relating to health, sanitation, education, food habits, family systems, etc.
- The Success of **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme** underscore the important of public communication strategy which is based on innovative local level interventions.
- On the one hand, local celebrities, opinion leaders and grass root workers have been roped in for popularising the logo, brand and USP of the program; on the other hand, community participation was ensured by celebrating events such as the birth of a girl child or school enrolment drives like '**School Chalein Hum**', '**Aao School Chalein**', etc.

Conclusion:

- The immense power of communication and new technologies has indeed triggered a motivation for enhanced participation and also generated an urge in articulating a demand for change.

- Today, majority of women are in position to fight for their rightful place in society. This newly earned confidence will go a long way in heralding a new era for women's multifaceted development.



VAJIRAM & RAVI